POCAHONTAS COUNTY

Juanita S. Dilley

BEAR STORY

About the year 1880, Francis McCoy and Rev. Asa Shinn McNeill went into Black Mountain to watch a suck lick for a deer. McCoy was watching the lick and McNeill was quite a distance away fixing camp for the night. Just as dusk was turning into night, McCoy heard a stick break behind his blind. Turning he saw a powerful big bear almost upon him. Bringing his set rifle into play, he aimed to shoot the bear through the head. Just as the gun fired the bear jerked up his head and the bullet struck low, breaking his jaw. That bear reached out his arms and embraced the man in a powerful hug. McCoy was the strong man of these mountains, but a four hundred pound, seven foot bear was a hand full for even so mighty a man as he. On the other hand McCoy was a pretty good arm full for any bear. The bear tried to bite but could not. It was luck at both ends of the line that he could not bite, for a bear will not rake with his able hind claws if he cannot grasp the object with his teeth. Out in the laurel, over rocks and fallen timber, it was a powerful struggle; the bear would not let go and the man could not for fear of a sweeping blow from the front paws. McNeill had heard the shot and went to help to bring in the deer, as he thought. He witnessed a scene few men have been privileged to see--a strong man in the embrace of of a great bear and holding his own remarkably well. There was small chance of shooting the bear without hitting the man. Finally McCoy managed the bear around to a place where McNeill could place the muzzle of his gun against his side and blow the everlasting day lights out of him.

McNeill always said that McCoys appearance was a plumb sight. He was covered with bear blood and mud, and his clothes sadly torn. Except for scratches and bruises he was not hurt.

Asa Shinn McNeill died March 28, 1937, age 86 years. He was the son of Jonathan McNeill of Swago. and his people say this bear tale is a true one.

(Many people who do not know Pocahontas county, do not believe our bear stories as true. They do not think we have as many bears as we claim to have. They do not stop to think that vast areas of the county is still a wilderness, not of virgin timber as formerly, but of undergrowth and laurel which makes an excellent hiding place for bears. Then too this is a sheep county, and ~~sheep~~ mutton made excellent food for them. Too, if the people did not hunt the bear so relentlessly we could not raise sheep.)

For this reason such men as Charley Tacy, Clifford Sharp, Amos Wooddell, Jake Jackson, Robert Gibson, James Gibson, Samuel Gibson, Ellis Dean, Ira King, Frank Rider, Forrest Rider, Arnold Rider, Elmer Sharp, George Gay, and Norman Shaw, render an invaluable service to the sheepmen of the county by so persistantly waging war on the bears. In 1932, Ellis Dean had 93 head of sheep. In the last eight years he has sold sixteen head of ewes. Last spring he sold seven lambs. Today he has one ewe and one lamb. Bears are the answer,

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* In pioneer times bears were sometimes caught in bear pens made by building a pen of rather large logs. The front was left open for the bear to enter. The top made of logs was constructed so that it would fall into the pen on top of the bear, when he attempted to remove the bait from the trigger, thus secueing him underneath.

Smaller animals were caught with the steel trap, by snare and dead falls. Poison was responsible for the disappearence of the wolves, almost over night.

* By-----Tom Bruffey of Lobelia